

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 5, 2004

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Ridge:

As you know, two leaders of an Albany, New York mosque have been arrested for trying to help an undercover agent posing as a terrorist purchase a shoulder-fired missile.

These two men – who are reportedly linked to al Qaeda – agreed to help the undercover agent launder money for the purpose of buying this weapon. A similar sting operation was conducted last August when a British arms dealer was arrested for selling what he thought was a shoulder-fired missile to an undercover agent.

Given these two successful sting operations, and the ongoing danger posed from shoulder-fired missiles, we request that the Department of Homeland Security accelerate its efforts to place anti-missile countermeasures on U.S. commercial aircraft. The administration's current plan to study this issue until 2006 is not acceptable. Israel, by comparison, is already in the process of equipping all of its commercial aircraft with countermeasures technology that is available today.

These weapons, also known as Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), are widely proliferated, relatively easy to use, available on the black market and in the possession of more than two dozen terrorist and non-state groups throughout the world. Al Qaeda is suspected of being behind previous shoulder-fired missile attacks against both commercial and military aircraft.

We must act without delay so that our commercial aircraft are not vulnerable to this very real threat.

Please get back to us immediately on how you plan to alter your timeline so that our people will know that appropriate defenses for our aircraft are on the way.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



Charles Schumer
United States Senator